Planning for B.C. Place
AN OVERVIEW

Progress Report #3 to Vancouver City Council

BC Place Citizens Advisory Committee

B. C. PLACE CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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April 22, 1982

His Worship Mayor Michael Harcourt
and Members of Council
City of Vancouver

Dear Mr. Mayor and Members of Council:

PROGRESS REPORT #3: PLANNING FOR B. C. PLACE

The B. C. Place Citizens' Advisory Committee is pleased to attach hereto an "OVERVIEW" of the opinions of members in regard to planning issues inherent in the redevelopment of the North Shore of False Creek. The report outlines the kinds of direction we would like to see followed and also identifies some of our particular concerns.

We respectfully request that our comments be considered in forthcoming discussions on B. C. Place planning. Representatives of the Committee would be pleased to participate.

In further progress reports, we plan to deal in more detail with some of the planning issues and development proposals and, currently, have subcommittees working on special specific issues such as housing, transportation, the water, participation and Expo '86 - Pier B-C.

We would like to express our appreciation of the time and help given to us by members of the City staff and of the co-operation of planning staff of B. C. Place.

Respectfully submitted,

Hilda Symonds

Hilda Symonds
Chairman

HS:eg

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SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS

I. INTRODUCTION

The magnitude and location of B. C. Place offer challenge and opportunity for sound planning, strong leadership, co-operative process.

II. MAJOR PLANNING ASPECTS

1. Planning Area - B. C. Place should be seen in a context widening from the North Shore of False Creek to include the downtown, adjacent neighbourhoods and eventually city and region.

2. Open Space - Water - False Creek a unique urban asset - preserve and enhance - balance cut and fill - avoid marinas or construction at narrow parts - improve water quality.

   Open Space - Land - Create east side destination park (approximately 38 acres) unique in learning and recreation facilities as setting for public structures (e.g. resources exhibits). Park to have waterfrontage, links to Gastown, Chinatown, Strathcona, waterway connection to Chinese Garden. Waterfront walks desirable for continuity with Stanley park etc. Number size and location of neighbourhood parks to be based on design of residential communities and to reflect proximity to downtown with variety in types including "London Square." Use roof tops.

3. Residential Development - Build residential communities not "shelter." Accommodate socio-economic mix in market and non-market housing. Provide public opportunity to comment on design alternatives.

4. Commercial Space - Provide employment opportunities. Do not use up land good for residential development; build in Georgia/Dunsmuir area. Be aware of constraints - existence of zoned land - market pressures. Proceed incrementally. No large retail development - only local service facilities.

5. Transportation and Parking - Implement downtown transportation plan as soon as possible. Main spine road should be "beautiful big street" - magnet for people. Emphasize transit. Knit B.C. Place into downtown transit fabric. Recognize neighbourhood fears re parking - provide as much as possible including special facilities at stadium for handicapped.

II. MAJOR PLANNING ASPECTS (continued)

6. Planning Process - Involve all affected parties in two-way flow of information and ideas. Early co-operative participation process saves time. Concept alternatives stimulate discussion and assist understanding.

III. SOME SPECIAL ISSUES

1. Heritage Concerns - Make good use of Roundhouse. Provide visible evidence of old water connection to Burrard Inlet. "Invisible Mending" to integrate Yaletown and B. C. Place.

2. Urban Design - Maintain view corridors. Step structures in gradual rise from water to downtown towers.

3. Handicapped - Employ specialist to ensure handicapped people can use all facilities. Make some appropriate housing available.

4. Displacement - Note impact of rise of land values causing current displacement, in adjacent neighbourhoods, of people in low cost accommodation. Intergovernmental action needed.

5. Social and Economic Impact Studies - Co-operative action needed as development schemes take place.

6. Expo '86 - Welcomed - Can be Phase 1 of land use planning. Fit short term needs of Expo into long term needs of B. C. Place.

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

B. C. Place can be Vancouver's twentieth century equivalent of nineteenth century preservation of Stanley Park. Best development calls for imagination, urban skills, co-operative, humane and caring approach.

FROM THE B. C. PLACE CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE

PROGRESS REPORT #3 April, 1982

PLANNING FOR B. C. PLACE
AN OVERVIEW

I. INTRODUCTION

The development of the North Shore of False Creek, now known as B. C. Place, is of a magnitude unprecedented in the history of Vancouver. Indeed it is the largest single inner city development taking place anywhere in North America. It therefore offers splendid opportunities for imaginative and innovative planning and design, for the resolution of certain social and economic concerns and for achieving a balance between the grand, the functional, and the appealing. It also presents a strong challenge to leadership for an enlightened and co-operative process of performance and execution.

The site of B. C. Place is an important part of the City of Vancouver and by location is inseparable from the heart of the city. Aerial photographs of the downtown peninsula clearly demonstrate how this site forms the southern edge of downtown, while photographs from further south emphasize that it is the northern shore of Vancouver's great central water body, False Creek. Thus, while B. C. Place components will undoubtedly provide strong interest links with the rest of the province, geography has ensured that B. C. Place is an integral part of the city fabric--a fact reinforced by history. Therefore, in contemplating the redevelopment of the area now to be known as B. C. Place, the Citizens Advisory Committee keeps in mind these two major planning aspects: the planning area and the planning opportunities.

While our thinking has been directed to a number of special aspects, we feel it to be important that these aspects should not be seen in isolation. In spite of the enormous size of the area to be redeveloped, and the fact that it will be a phased development, we feel that components and phases should be seen as elements in a total yet flexible vision of B. C. Place and its positive role in the development of Vancouver and the province.

II. MAJOR PLANNING ASPECTS

1. The Planning Area

The planning area to be considered as context for B. C. Place is not simply the 220 acres amassed by the

Provincial Government. At the very least, it encompasses the downtown core, the adjacent inner city neighbourhoods, the totality of False Creek. In the larger planning sense, B. C. Place should relate rationally to the whole of the city and indeed the city's region. It is too large a development to be considered in even partial isolation from this broad planning concept. While B. C. Place will have its own individual character, it needs to be seen as part of a larger planning area and, in particular, to be "knitted" in to the adjacent parts of the city. This, of course, must be a major concern of the city.

2. Open Space and Public Amenities - Water and Land

(a) Water

False Creek provides a large visual open space adjacent to B. C. Place. However, it is much more than this. It is a priceless public urban asset--the kind that does not exist in the majority of cities. In Vancouver, this body of water stands out as the keystone of the inner city--the "gatherer" linking and integrating disparate parts and major precincts. It is the centre of everything. It is also as integral a part of the city's assets as its mountains, its ocean, and Stanley Park. It is an important lung of the inner city, as well as a recreational and aesthetic amenity and possible vehicle for transportation.

The Citizens' Committee endorses City policy in regard to the False Creek surface. Any proposed fill should be balanced by appropriate cutting and should be clearly seen to improve the attractiveness of the outline of the Creek. At no time should fill result in narrowing further the existing narrow parts of the Creek. Also, any desired water channels or lakes should not be taken as justification for decrease of the main body of water. Concern for this kind of approach means in essence that the Citizens' Committee cannot support the idea of man-made islands in False Creek, nor the creation of or extension of marinas or land-based structures at the very narrow parts of False Creek. Nevertheless we appreciate the fact that such proposals demonstrate a concern for improving the existing shoreline.

We are informed by members of the Committee who live in or near the water body of False Creek that it is a busy place, and that any proposed increase in water surface activity will need careful review. Shoreline or beach recreation, however, could be usefully encouraged. This places a high priority on improvement of water quality and all alternative methods should be explored for economy and efficiency.

It may be mentioned here that the placing and height of structures in B. C. Place will be an important factor in the enhancement of the visual quality of the water body. This will be referred to in a later section.

(b) Land

In addition to other designated park space, we would like to see B. C. Place provide one large important destination park (approximately the size of Vanier park, 15.3 hectares or 37.8 acres) at the eastern end of the Creek. The western and southern parts of False Creek already provide large areas of open space, while the eastern end is notably lacking in such open spaces, in water access and public facilities.

The park we are proposing should include waterfrontage. There should be an integrated system linking it with Chinatown, Strathcona and Gastown. The suggested water connection to the long planned beautiful Chinese Garden sounds attractive, providing its scale and design are in harmony with its purpose of enhancing this very important garden. The park, as a whole, should be innovative in design and an alternative recreation area to other city parks. It would also serve a provincial purpose as it would be a good setting for various public structures such as the proposed forestry, fisheries and mining exhibits and science museum. Further, it could be linked to the facilities expected to surround the stadium. This large park should be a unique urban space in which public structures are linked by green spaces and landscaped corridors that ultimately join together the east side of Vancouver, B. C. Place and downtown. Thus, this park can be a major public amenity, unique in learning and recreation facilities, serving not only the people who will live in B. C. Place and the people of adjacent neighbourhoods, but the city as a whole and its many visitors.

Waterfront walks can provide continuity with the West End and Stanley Park and with South False Creek and Vanier Park. As part of a network for pedestrians, with appropriate facilities for bicycles, many interesting areas can eventually be connected. Vancouver has a need for more "walking" connections between its areas of special pedestrian interest. In any case, proximity to the water is a main reason for Vancouver's being, and every effort should be made to emphasize this. However, in addition to the continuity and connective functions, such walks will be in themselves an attractive feature of the provincial "gathering-place."
The number, size and location of neighbourhood parks should be adequately related to the decisions made

about the residential development. Standards should be high and not minimal. The future residents of B. C. Place should find it in every way a satisfying place in which to live. It is our hope that the community of the North Shore of False Creek will reflect a socio-economic diversity in population and, therefore, in structures and spaces. But it should also reflect its proximity to downtown. In such a location, neighbourhood open spaces will be at a premium and thus there will need to be a variety of types of open space. Some should be designed with recreation activities for all ages in view, but others with some allowance for privacy. In this connection, we are suggesting that the London "Square" should be kept in mind. In addition, it may well be that some roof tops can provide active or passive recreation spaces, and that ground parks can become part of some of the view corridors. Neighbourhood parks should be distinctly different from our proposed large east end park.

3. Residential Development

Great advantages can be gained by bringing housing close to working places and other central facilities. Because of proximity to downtown, to the water body of False Creek, to Vancouver's special amenities such as Stanley Park, Granville Island, Vanier Park, and to our historic neighbourhoods, B. C. Place will be an excellent location for residential communities.

Further, because of Vancouver's traditional residential patterns and resultant zonings, there are few places left in this small city (44 square miles) where multiple housing can be built. Demand for housing in the city--which is the core of the region--is already high and will not be expected to lessen as the city's undoubted growth potential is realized in coming years. It is important, therefore, that this extensive development should include a considerable residential component.

The major issue is the creation of residential communities rather than so much "shelter." Factors of design, variety in types of housing to accommodate families, singles, elderly, handicapped, provision of adequate support amenities are all important as is variety in forms of financial and occupancy arrangements. Attention to all these factors will be needed to ensure some relationship to the kind of socio-economic mix typical of the city's population and already reflected in the development of the south side of False Creek. This means a requirement for both market and non-market housing and a strong emphasis on affordability. There is a long waiting list for all forms of non-market housing. B. C. Place, as a public corporation using land bought by the people of B. C., must demonstrate

a public conscience and take some responsibility to include housing for those people for whom private market housing on private land is no solution to the housing problem. To help to meet needs for affordable housing and non-market housing, B. C. Place must work with all levels of government.

As development of B. C. Place will be essentially a phased development, it is most important that the first residential community to be built should be an outstanding example of fine design and humane neighbourhood planning suitable for a downtown location. For this to be achieved, it will be essential to give prime consideration to factors of livability--appropriate design, careful planning, adequate community facilities to required standards, attention to streets, open spaces and energy efficiency. Chosen densities should be in accord with concern for these factors and also with appropriateness to the location and the environment. Thus, quantity should be determined by considerations of quality.

Many people will hope to live in B. C. Place--from the wealthy to the needy, from the executives to the wide range of service workers, from those requiring family housing and places for children to the singles, to the groups or individuals with special needs. There should be some opportunities for public choice, some chance to examine and comment on design alternatives before too much takes on a permanent shape.

4. Commercial Space

The Committee hopes to see a balanced development in B. C. Place and this would indicate that there should be employment opportunities reasonably close to the proposed new residential development on the B. C. Place lands. The provision of office and other work space should be in the context not only of downtown development policy, but also in the context of city-wide employment opportunities.

Careful planning will be necessary as there are some possible constraints on the above kind of development.

In the first place, there already exists in the adjacent downtown a considerable amount of land zoned for office and other commercial development. Any relevant commercial zoning in B. C. Place, therefore, should be careful and incremental. Further, in B. C. Place we are faced not only with the question of how much office/commercial space is desirable but also with the question of what and when private developers will be prepared to build there. The market has much to do with what can actually take place. Moreover, downtown property owners may well resist any idea of B. C. Place creating, so to speak,

a "provincial office park" based on non-competitive land values or other inducements as might be the case with housing.

Nevertheless, we look for employment opportunities and we also recognize that these will probably include commercial facilities needed to serve the development itself. We would not wish to see such facilities oust good locations for housing and, therefore, the appropriate place for large commercial structures would appear to be in the area of the Georgia/Dunsmuir viaducts and perhaps towards the Cambie Street Bridge--provided that soils are suitable.

Concern has been expressed that B. C. Place might wish to build a large retail shopping facility on its site. A wide range of convenient retail facilities already exists in downtown and on Granville Island. However, some local retail will be needed as part of residential community development. Hotel(s) near the proposed rapid transit link with the Trade and Convention Centre would seem to be appropriate but might be built economically by the private sector.

Factors to be considered in regard to the size and density of office development include density of street use and traffic congestion in an area likely to be strongly affected in these ways by the use of the stadium. Such matters must be satisfactorily clarified. There is a need for a clearly stated City policy in regard to the city's total commercial development and the part B. C. Place can play in this.

We would like to note, however, that there is some opportunity here to provide or facilitate small office and studio work spaces in areas and buildings that also provide housing, as there are now many professionals and tradesmen who only need small space and do not wish to be in large concentrations of office space. This type of arrangement tends to disperse rush hours and create areas with a twenty-four hour use pattern. Mixed-use buildings and areas present a creative challenge to B. C. Place.

5. Transportation and Parking

(a) Road System

The Committee has already made its observations on the major roadway system in its report of January 28, 1982. While the alignment has now been approved (a combination of Schemes F and C), we wish to reiterate our belief that other measures remain essential if traffic problems are to be mitigated.

The downtown transportation plan needs to be fully implemented if surrounding neighbourhoods are not to be made to pay the price of greatly increased traffic and parking impacts. The design of the Cambie Street Bridge will be important.

It is important that the spine road should not be a "high speed" road. As the major thoroughfare of B. C. Place, it should have a distinct and appealing character. We hope to see a beautiful great street with boulevard, shops, theatres--a magnet for people, a place of liveliness and interest. This street should also have easy connections with local and downtown streets and with adjoining neighbourhoods, and should not intimidate pedestrian use of such connections. Waterborne connections should not be overlooked.

(b) Transit

B. C. Place, UTA and the City should emphasize and facilitate public transit both within the site and in regard to access to the stadium. While we appreciate the technical problems, we would like to see a "Park-and-Ride" system designed without delay. A twenty-five percent transit use for the stadium traffic (before ALRT) has been suggested as probable. It would be our hope that this could be raised to thirty-five percent. In general, the Committee believes that the public must be encouraged to view downtown as an area for public transportation. This is already the case in many American and European cities. With the construction of the stadium, this change in attitude is even more urgent. We would like to see the downtown transit system reworked so as to knit B. C. Place into the transit fabric of downtown with adequate connections to adjacent neighbourhoods. This would further ensure that B. C. Place is a part of the city and its heart.

(c) Traffic and Parking

Until such time as greatly increased use of transit becomes the norm, traffic and parking will be important concerns. Adjacent neighbourhoods have continually expressed their fears about over-use of their streets as a result of the new developments in B. C. Place. It is important that these fears should be recognized and all possible provision for relief be made. With twenty-five percent use of transit, some 45,000 people will come by car to a number of stadium events, and will wish to park as near as possible. Proposals for 2,000 parking spaces would seem to be a minimum. The Committee welcomes the establishment of a Stadium Events Co-ordinating Committee (which includes the City Engineer) as a valuable and helpful advance in regard to the parking problem. As a final note, we would ask that special provision for the handicapped should be included in the stadium parking.

6. Planning Process

It is important to involve all affected parties in the planning process. Experience has shown that the main essential is provision for a flow of information and ideas--in both directions--between developer, decision-makers (elected and appointed) and general public. All are actors, and all feel the impact of decisions. The Citizens' Committee welcomes the statement of objectives by all parties, the circulation of concept plans and proposals, and discussion at all levels including major public discussion. Well-handled and sincere, this interactive process enriches development. Without it, public consensus and desired public support may elude those who need it to proceed with implementation of plans. It is apparent that we now live in an age of involvement. Co-operative participation early in the schedule can mean less friction and an ultimate saving of precious time by maximizing insights and allowing the expression and consideration of concerns. This kind of process is particularly important where the public is both developer and recipient.

The Committee has repeatedly expressed concern for the need for a visible interchange between all those parties directly involved in aspects of the development of False Creek--B. C. Place, Expo '86, Urban Transit Authority, City of Vancouver, Greater Vancouver Regional District. Recent arrangements between the Federal and Provincial Governments would appear to have facilitated this. We feel that there is a confusion in the minds of large sectors of the public in regard to jurisdictions and to plans. However, this does not mean that at the concept stage there should be no differences in aims and points of view. Alternatives in concept plans can stimulate discussion and thus make a valuable contribution to understanding of issues and eventual refinement of final plans.

III. SOME SPECIAL ISSUES

1. Heritage Concerns

The nearness of Vancouver's Centenary (1986) is clearly strengthening a growing awareness of the importance of preserving the city's heritage. This kind of situation was very apparent at the time of the provincial celebration of one hundred years of history when, throughout the province, many towns and villages gave added significance and prominence to their historic monuments. The development of B.C. Place offers some special opportunities. We are pleased that the Roundhouse has now been totally abandoned and trust that as much of it as possible will find new life in B.C. Place.

We see an opportunity also to revive the historic direct connection between False Creek, Gastown and Burrard Inlet --the one-time Canoe Pass. In Manhattan, New York has painted blue lines on roads and buildings to indicate its old waterways and levels. If an actual waterway is not practicable, perhaps the Manhattan device could be used in connection with a direct land "corridor" between Vancouver's historic area and the east end of False Creek.

Yaletown is bound to change--but not too much, we hope. Its distinctive flavour and scale can provide contrast, charm and interest, especially if a process of "invisible mending" takes place and the new opens into the old, and vice versa.

2. Urban Design

Urban design is perhaps in a way consideration of the aesthetic envelope, the harmonious relationship of the parts. Total development of B. C. Place is a long way away but we would like to see two major principles established from the beginning. One of these is preservation of view corridors by careful placement of structures in relation to streets and other open spaces. The other relates to the openness of the False Creek basin. To maintain the "wholeness" of False Creek, we would like to see some stepping of structures, so that they rise gradually from the water's edge to the towers of downtown. In these matters, Expo '86 may provide some valuable visual legacies to attune us to the impact of development while still offering opportunities for modification.

3. Handicapped

As a place to live, to work, and to recreate, B. C. Place must be as accessible as possible to all citizens. Of particular concern is accessibility to the handicapped who may need certain special facilities in regard to housing, employment, recreation, mobility.

We recommend that B. C. Place employ a specialist to ensure that handicapped people of all kinds can make use of all public facilities provided, including the stadium, and that appropriate housing is available. We are pleased to note that Expo '86 is apparently giving special consideration to the needs of the handicapped.

4. Displacement

Members of the Citizens' Committee are very concerned about an early impact of the development of B. C. Place on surrounding neighbourhoods. This is the urgent problem of people already displaced from low-cost housing through rapidly rising land values in areas adjacent to B. C. Place, such as the downtown east side. Such housing is scarce and the closure (for remodelling, up-dating or replacement) of old rooming houses and hotels cannot help but bring hardship and grief. We recognize that this displacement is not a direct result of a B. C. Place Crown Corporation strategy or policy but of the force of the market place in our society. However, we feel that this social concern should be noted immediately and tackled by co-operative inter-government action with leadership taken by the Provincial Government that created the Crown Corporation.

5. Social and Economic Impact Studies

As specific development schemes take shape, we hope that all authorities concerned will co-operate in appropriate social and economic impact studies. A development of the magnitude of B. C. Place produces a tidal wave of reaction compared with the ripples from small projects. Confidence not apprehension should be generated.

6. Expo '86

We welcome Expo '86, as we see in it what will be Phase I of the land use planning for the extensive area of B. C. Place. We hope Expo will be designed and executed with the long term needs of the site in mind, fitting the short term needs of the summer of 1986 into this larger perspective. The development of Expo '86 thus provides a unique opportunity for an innovative approach to the development of B. C. Place.

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

To those who have lived in Vancouver for many years, the transformation of the south side of False Creek from an area of old and often obsolete industries to a mixed residential area is almost a modern miracle. Now we are to start to think about another "miracle" on the north side--a miracle for the twentieth century that may well take its place in the city's history alongside the nineteenth century preservation of Stanley Park.

Pride in their city is a strong characteristic of Vancouver citizens. The possibilities inherent in the redevelopment of False Creek North and the creation of a great public place by the public sector offer manifold opportunities for increasing that pride. The members of the Council-appointed Citizens' Advisory Committee on B. C. Place are pleased individually and collectively to be associated with this venture.

It may sound facile--but we want the best possible development of this important and extensive site. We want variety, good design, fine residential and public amenities, attractive and usable open space, opportunities for employment. We want to see the False Creek basin enhanced, the downtown complemented, the adjoining neighbourhoods offered new vistas, new satisfactions. We want to see past, present and future join hands here and people of all ages find enjoyment and satisfaction.

We know that change has its perils and its problems, as well as its opportunities and excitement. But we believe that with imagination, with the application of technical and professional urban skills and, above all, with a co-operative, humane and caring approach, B. C. Place can be a place of civic and provincial pride for us all.